



# **Cinderella and the Glass Slipper**



There were once upon a time three sisters who lived in an old, high, stone house in a street not very far from the great square of the city where was the palace of the King. The two eldest of these sisters were old and ugly, which is bad enough. They were also sour and jealous, which is worse. And simply because the youngest (who was only their half-sister) was gentle and lovely, they hated her.

While they themselves sat in comfort in their fine rooms upstairs, she was made to live in a dark, stone-flagged kitchen with nothing but rats, mice, and cockroaches for company. There, in a kind of cupboard, she slept. By day she did the housework—cooking and scrubbing and sweeping and scouring. She made the beds, she washed their linen, she darned their stockings, she mended their clothes. She was never in bed till midnight; and, summer or winter, she had to be up every morning at five, to fetch water, to chop up the firewood and light the fires. In the blind, frozen mornings of winter she could scarcely creep about for the cold.



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Yet, in spite of all this, though she hadn't enough to eat, though her sisters never wearied of nagging and scolding at her, or of beating her, either, when they felt in the humour, she soon forgot their tongues and bruises. She must have been happy by nature, just as by nature a may-tree is covered with leaves and blossom, or water jets out of a well-spring. To catch sight of a sunbeam lighting up the kitchen wall now and then, or the moonlight stealing across the floor, or merely to wake and hear the birds shrilling at daybreak, was enough to set her heart on fire.

She would jump out of bed, say her prayers, slip into her rags, wash her bright face under the pump, comb her dark hair; then, singing too, not like the birds, but softly under her breath, would begin her work. Sometimes she would set herself races against the old kitchen clock; or say to herself, "When I've done this and this and this and *this*, I'll look out of the window." However late it was before the day was finished, she made it a rule always to sit for a little while in front of the great kitchen fire, her stool drawn close up to the hearth among the cinders. There she would begin to dream even before she fell asleep; and in mockery her sisters called her Cinderella.

They never left her at peace. If they could not find work for her to do, they made it; and for food gave her their crusts and bits left over. They hated her, and hated her all the more because, in spite of their scowls and grumblings, she never stayed mumpish or sulky, while her cheeks ever grew fairer and her eyes brighter. She couldn't help it. Since she felt young and happy, she couldn't but seem so.

Now all this may have been in part because Cinderella had a fairy godmother. This fairy godmother had come to her christening, and well the sisters remembered it. This little bunched-up old woman had a hump on her back, was dressed in outlandish clothes

and a high steeple hat, and the two impudent trollops (who even then tried to make themselves look younger than they were) had called her “Old Stump-Stump,” had put out their tongues at her, and laughed at every word she said.

But, except for one slow piercing look at them out of her green eyes (after which they laughed no more), the old woman had paid them no heed. She had stooped over Cinderella’s wooden cradle and gazed a long time at her sleeping face, then, laying her skinny fore-finger on the mite’s chin, she had slowly nodded—once, twice, thrice. If every nod meant a fairy gift, then what wonder Cinderella had cheeks like a wild rose, eyes clear as dewdrops, and a tongue like a blackbird’s?

Now Cinderella, of course, could not remember her christening; and her godmother had never been seen or heard of since. She seemed to have quite forgotten her godchild; and when one day Cinderella spoke of her to her sisters, they were beside themselves with rage.

“Godmother, forsooth!” they cackled. “Crazy old humpback! Much she cares for you, Miss Slut! Keep to your cinders; and no more drowsing and dreaming by the fire!”

So time went on, until at last Cinderella was so used to their pinchings and beatings and scoldings that she hardly noticed them. She kept out of their company as much as she could, almost forgot how to cry, was happy when she was alone, and was never idle.

Now a little before Christmas in the year when Cinderella was eighteen, the King sent out his trumpeters to proclaim that on Twelfth Night there was to be a great Ball at the Palace, with such dancing and feasting and revelry as had never been known in that country before. Bonfires were to be lit on the hills, torches in the streets. There were to be stalls of hot pies, eels, sweetmeats, cakes

and comfits in the market-place. There were to be booths showing strange animals and birds and suchlike; and the fountains in the city were to run that night with wine. For the next day after it would be the twenty-first birthday of the King's only son. When the people heard the proclamation of the King's trumpeters, there were wild rejoicings, and they at once began to make ready for the feast.

In due time there came to the old stone house where the three sisters lived the King's Lord Chamberlain. At sound of the wheels of his coach the two elder sisters squinnied down out of their window and then at once scuttled downstairs to lock Cinderella up in the kitchen, in case he should see not only her rags, but her lovely young face. He had come, as they guessed, to bring them the King's command that they should attend the great Ball. "I see, madam, three are invited," he said, looking at his scroll.

"Ay," said they, as if in grief, "but only two of us are left." So he bowed and withdrew.

After that the two old sisters scarcely stopped talking about the Ball. They could think of nothing else. They spent the whole day and every day in turning out their chests and wardrobes in search of whatever bit of old finery they could lay hands on. For hours together they sat in front of their great looking-glass, smirking this way and languishing that, trying on any old gown or cloak they could find—slippers and sashes, wigs and laces and buckles and necklaces, and never of the same mind for two minutes together. And when they weren't storming at Cinderella, they were quarrelling and wrangling between themselves.

As for Cinderella, from morning to night she sat stitching and stitching till she could scarcely see out of her young eyes or hold her needle. The harder she worked and the more she tried to please them, the worse they fumed and flustered. They were like wasps in a trap.

At last came the night of the Ball. The streets were ablaze with torches and bonfires. In every window burned wax tapers. Shawls and silks of all the colours of the rainbow dangled from sill and balcony. Wine red and golden gushed from the fountains. Everywhere there was feasting and merriment, laughter and music. At one end of the city was a booth of travelling bears, which were soon so crammed with buns and honeycomb that they could only sit and pant; and at the other was a troupe of Barbary apes that played on every kind of instrument of music. Besides which, there was a singing Mermaid; a Giant, with a dwarf on his hat-brim; and a wild man from the Indies that gulped down flaming pitch as if it were milk and water.

The country people, all in their best and gayest clothes (and they came from far and near as if to a Fair), had brought their children even to the youngest, and stood gazing and gaping at the dressed-up lords and ladies in their coaches and carriages on their way to the Palace. There were coaches with six horses, and coaches with four; and a fat, furred, scarlet-silked postillion to each pair. The whole city under the tent of the starry night flared bright as a peepshow.

But Cinderella hadn't a moment even to peer down from an upper window at these wonders. She hardly knew whether she was on her head or her heels. And when at last her two old sisters—looking in their wigs and powder more like bunched-up fantastic monkeys than human beings—had at last rolled off in their hired carriage to the Palace, she was so tired she could scarcely creep upstairs.

After tidying up the litter in their bedrooms, and making a pot of soup to be kept simmering for them till they came home, she drew her stool up to the kitchen fire, with not even the heart to look out of the window. She had never before felt so lonely or



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wretched, and as she sat there in the red glow of the smouldering coals, before even she knew it was there, a tear rolled down her cheek and splashed with a sizzle into the hot ashes. She ached all over. Nevertheless she poked up the fire again, swept up the ashes, began to sing a little to herself, forgot to go on, and as she did so set to wondering what *she* would be doing now if she herself had gone to the Palace. “But since you can’t be in two places at once, my dear,” she suddenly laughed out loud, “why here you must stay.”

By now it had grown quieter in the streets, and against the black of the window in the wintry night snow was falling. Sitting on her stool among the cinders, Cinderella listened to the far-away strains of music. But these too died away as she listened; utter silence came with the snow; and in a minute or two she would have fallen fast asleep.

Indeed, all was so hushed at last in the vacant kitchen that the ashes, like pygmy bells in a belfry, tinkled as they fell; a cricket began shrilly churring from a crevice in the hob, and she could hear the tiny *tic-a-tac-tac* of the mice as they came tippeting and frisking round her stool. Then, suddenly, softly, and without warning, there sounded out of the deep hush a gentle knock-knocking at the door.

Cinderella’s drowsy eyes opened wide. The mice scuttled to their wainscot. Then all was still again. What stranger was this, come in the dark and the snow? Maybe, thought Cinderella, it was only the wind in the ivy. But no, yet again there sounded that gentle knocking—there could be no mistake of that. So Cinderella rose from her stool, lit the tallow candle in an old copper candlestick, and, lifting the latch, peered out into the night.

The stars of huge Orion were wildly shaking in the dark hollow of the sky; the cold air lapped her cheek; and the garden was mantled deep and white as wool with snow. And behold on the

doorstep stood a little old humpbacked woman, with a steeple hat on her head, and over her round shoulders a buckled green cloak that came down to her very heels.

“Good-evening, my dear,” said the old woman. “I see you don’t know who *I* am?” Her green eyes gleamed in the candlelight as she peered into the gloom of the kitchen. “And why, pray, are you sitting here alone, when all the world is gone to the Ball?”

Cinderella looked at her—at her green far-set eyes and long hooked nose, and she smiled back at the old woman and begged her to come in. Then she told her about the Ball.

“Ahai!” said the old woman, “and I’ll be bound to say, my dear, you’d like to go too. Ay, so I thought. Come, then, there’s no time to waste. Night’s speeding on. Put on your gown and we’ll be off to the Palace at once.”

Now her sisters had strictly forbidden Cinderella to stir from the house in their absence. Bread and water for three days they had threatened her with if she so much as opened the door. But she knew in her heart they had not told her the truth about the Ball. She knew she had been invited to go too; and now she was not so frightened of them as she used to be. None the less, she could only smile in reply to the old woman, and all she could say was: “It’s very very kind of you, ma’am. I should dearly like to go to the Ball, and I’m sorry; but I’ve nothing to go in.”

Now the old woman was carrying in her hand (for she stooped nearly double) a crutch or staff, and she said, “Ahai! my dear! Rags and skin, eh? So it’s nothing but a gown you need. *That’s* soon mended.”

With that, she lifted a little her crutch into the air, and as if at a sign and as if an owl had swooped in out of the night, there floated in through the open door out of the darkness and snow a small square Arabian leather trunk, red and gold, with silver hinges and a silver lock.

The old woman touched the lock with her crutch and the lid flew open. And beneath the lid there lay a gown of spangled orient muslin edged with swansdown and seed pearls and white as hoar-frost. There was a fan of strange white feathers, too, and a wreath of green leaves and snow-flowers, such flowers as bloom only on the tops of the mountains under the stars.

“So there’s the gown!” said the old woman with a cackle. “Now hasten, my dear. Polish up those bright young cheeks of yours, and we’ll soon get a-going.”

Cinderella ran off at once into the scullery, put her face under the pump, and scrubbed away until her cheeks were like wild roses, and her hands like cuckoo-flowers. She came back combing her hair with all that was left of her old comb, and then and there, in front of the kitchen fire, shook herself free of her rags and slipped into the muslin gown. Whereupon she looked exactly like a rose-bush dazzling with hoar-frost under the moon.

The old woman herself laced up the silver laces, and herself with a silver pin pinned the wreath of green leaves and snow-flowers in Cinderella’s dark hair, then kissed her on both cheeks. As they stood there together, yet again the far-away music of fiddle and trumpet came stealing in through the night air from the Palace. And suddenly Cinderella frowned, and a shadow stole over her face.

“But look, ma’am,” said she, “just look at my old shoes!” For there they stood, both of them together by the hearth, two old battered clouts that had long been friends in need and in deed, but had by now seen far too much of the world. The old woman laughed and stooped over them.

“Why,” she said, “what’s being old, my dear? Merely little by little, and less by less.” As she said these words, she jerked up the tip of her crutch again, and, behold, the two old patched-up shoes

seemed to have floated off into another world and come back again. For in their stead was a pair of slippers the like of which Cinderella had never seen or even dreamed of. They were of spun glass and lined with swansdown, and Cinderella slipped her ten toes into them as easily as a minnow slips under a stone.

“Oh, Godmother! Look!” she cried. “And now I am ready!”

“Ahai!” said the old woman, pleased to her very heart-strings with her happy young god-daughter. “And how, pray, are we going to get through the snow?”

“I think, do you know, dear Godmother,” said Cinderella, frowning a little, “I should love to *walk*.” Her Godmother pointed with her crutch, and, looking at Cinderella with her sharp green eyes, said:

“Never grumbling, nought awry;  
*Always willing* asks no why;  
Patient waiting, free as air—  
What’s that pumpkin over there?”

Then Cinderella looked at the old summer pumpkin in the corner by the dresser that had been put by for pie in the winter, and didn’t know what to say.

“Bring it a little closer, my dear,” said her Godmother. So Cinderella lifted the great pumpkin in her bare arms and laid it down by the hearth. Once more the old woman waved her crutch, and behold, the pumpkin swelled and swelled before Cinderella’s very eyes; it swelled in its faded mottled green till it was as huge as a puncheon of wine, and then split softly open. And before Cinderella could so much as sigh with surprise and delight, there, on its snow-slides, stood a small, round-topped, green and white coach.

“Ahai!” breathed the old woman again, and out of their holes came scampering a round dozen of house mice, which, with yet another wave of her crutch, were at once transformed into twelve small deer, like gazelles, with silver antlers, and harness of silver, bridles and reins. Six of them stood out in the snow under the stars, four of them in the kitchen, and two in the entry. Then out from a larger hole under the shelf where the pots and pans were kept, and behind which was the stone larder with its bacon and cheeses, brisked four smart black rats; and these also were changed and transmogrified as if at a whisper, and now sat up on the coach, two in front and two behind—a sharp-nosed coachman and three dapper footmen. And the coachman sat with the long reins in his hand, waiting for Cinderella to get in.

Then the old woman said:

“And now, my dear, I must leave you. There’s but one thing you must remember. Be sure to hasten away from the Palace before the clock has finished tolling twelve. Midnight, my dear. The coach will be waiting, and you must haste away home.”

Cinderella looked at her Godmother, and for the second time that evening a tear rolled glittering down her cheek. Oddly enough, though this was a tear of happiness, it was *exactly* like the tear that had rolled down her cheek in her wretchedness as she sat alone.

“Oh, dear, dear Godmother, how can I thank you?” she said.

“Well, my dear,” said the old woman, “if you don’t know how, why, you can’t. And if you can’t, why, you needn’t.” And she kissed her once more.

Then Cinderella stepped into the coach. The old woman lifted her crutch. The coachman cracked his whip. The deer, with their silver clashing antlers and silver harness, scooped in the snow their slender hoofs, and out of the kitchen off slid the coach into a

silence soft as wool. On, on, under the dark starry sky into streets still flaming and blazing with torches and bonfires, it swept, bearing inside of it not only the last of the King's guests, but by far the loveliest. As for the people still abroad, at sight of it and of Cinderella they opened their mouths in the utmost astonishment, then broke into a loud huzza. But Cinderella heard not a whisper—she was gone in a flash.

When she appeared in the great ball-room, thronged with splendour, its flowers vying in light with its thousands of wax candles in sconce and chandelier, even the fiddlers stopped bowing an instant to gaze at such a wonder. Even so much as one peep at Cinderella was a joy and a marvel.

The Prince himself came down from the daïs where sat his father and mother, and himself led Cinderella to the throne. They danced together once, they danced together twice, and yet again. And Cinderella, being so happy and lovely, and without scorn, pride or vanity in her face, everyone there delighted to watch her, except only her two miserable half-sisters, who sat in a corner under a bunch of mistletoe and glared at her in envy and rage.

Not that they even dreamed who she was. No, even though they were her half-sisters, and had lived in the same house with her since she was a child. But then, who could have supposed this was the slattern and drudge they had left at home among her cinders?

But how swiftly slips time away when the heart is happy! The music, the radiant tapers, the talking and feasting—the hours melted like hoar-frost in the sun. And even while Cinderella was once more dancing with the Prince, his dark eyes looking as if he himself were half a-dream, Cinderella heard again the great bell of the Palace clock begin to toll: *One—two—three . . .*

“Oh!” she sighed, and her heart seemed to stand still, “I hear a clock!”

And the Prince said: "Never heed the clock. It is telling us only how little time we have, and how well we should use it." *Five—six—seven . . .*

But "Oh!" Cinderella said, "what time is it telling?"

And the Prince said, "Midnight."

With that, all the colour ebbed out of her young cheeks. She drew herself away from the Prince, and ran off as fast as her feet could carry her. Straight out of the ball-room she scampered, down the long corridor, down yet another, and down the marble staircase. But as she turned at the foot of the staircase, she stumbled a little, and her left slipper slipped off. Cinderella could not wait. Eleven strokes had sounded, and as she leapt breathlessly into the coach there boomed out the twelfth. She was not a moment too soon.

Presently after, yet as if in no time, she found herself at home again in the cold black kitchen. Nothing was changed, though the fire was out, the candle but a stub. There in its corner by the potboard lay the pumpkin. And here as of old sat she herself, shivering a little in her rags on her three-legged stool among the cinders, and only the draughty door ajar and a few tiny plumes of swansdown on the flagstones for proof that she had ever stirred from the house.

But for these, all that had passed might have been a dream. But Cinderella was far too happy for that to be true, and her face was smiling as she looked into the cold ashes of the fire. She looked and she pondered; and while she was pondering, it was as if a voice had asked her a question, "Why is your foot so cold?"

She looked down, and to her dismay saw on one foot a glass slipper, and on the other nothing but an old black stocking. The old woman's magic had come and gone, but it had forgotten a slipper. And even while Cinderella was thinking what she should do, there



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came a loud pealing of the bell above her head, and she knew that her sisters had come back from the Ball.

So, one foot shod and one foot stockinged, she hastened upstairs with the soup, and helped her sisters to get to bed. Never before had they been in such a rage. Nothing she could do was right. They pinched her when she came near, and flung their slippers at her when she went away; and she soon knew what was amiss. They could talk of nothing else but the strange princess (as they thought her) who had come late to the Ball and with her witcheries had enchanted not only the young Prince but even the King and Queen and the whole Court, down to the very dwarfs, imps, and pages. Their tired old eyes squinted with envy, and they seemed so worn-out and wretched that Cinderella longed to comfort them if only but just to say: "But why trouble about her? *She* will never come back again."

She was thankful at any rate they were too busy with their tongues to notice her feet; and at last she slipped downstairs, *clip-clop, clip-clop*, and was soon safe in bed and asleep.

The very next day the royal trumpeters were trumpeting in the streets once more. Even the Prince had not been able to run as fast as Cinderella, and had come out into the snowy night only just in time to see her coach of magic vanish into the dark. But he had picked up her slipper as he came back.

Proclamation was sounded that anyone who should bring tidings of this lovely young stranger or of her slipper, should be richly rewarded. But Cinderella in her kitchen heard not even an echo of the trumpeters. So they trumpeted in vain.

Then the King sent out his Lord Chamberlain with six pages to attend him. They were bidden search through the city, house by house. And one of the pages carried before the Lord Chamberlain the glass slipper on a crimson cushion with tassels of pearls. At

each house in turn, every lady in it was bidden try on the slipper, for the King was determined to find its owner, unless indeed she was of the undiscoverable Courts of Faërie. For most of the ladies the slipper was too high in the instep; for many it was too narrow in the tread; and for all it was far too short.

At last, the Lord Chamberlain came to the house of the three sisters. The two old sisters had already heard what passed when the page brought in the slipper. So the elder of them with a pair of tailor's shears had snipped off a big toe, and bound up her foot with a bandage. But even this was of no avail. For when she tried, in spite of the pain, to push her foot into it, the slipper was far too narrow. The second sister also, with a great cook's knife, had secretly carved off a piece of her heel, and had bound that foot up with a bandage. But even this was of no avail. For push and pull as she might, the shoe was at least an inch too short.

The Lord Chamberlain looked angrily at the sisters.

"Is there any other lady dwelling in this house?" he said.

The two sisters narrowed their eyes one at the other, and lied and said, "No." Yet even at that very moment there welled in a faint singing as if out of the very bowels of the earth.

The Lord Chamberlain said, "What voice is that I hear?"

The two sisters almost squinted as they glanced again each at the other, and the one said it was a tame popinjay: and the other that it was the creaking of the pump.

"Then," said the Lord Chamberlain, "the pump has learned English!" He at once sent two of his pages to seek out the singer whose voice he had heard, and to bring her into his presence. So Cinderella had to appear before him in her rags, just as she was. But when she saw the glass slipper on the crimson cushion, she almost laughed out loud.

The Lord Chamberlain, marvelling at her beauty, said: "Why do you smile, my child?"

She said, "Because, my lord, I have a slipper exactly like that one myself. It's in a drawer in the kitchen dresser." And when one of the pages had brought the other slipper, behold, Cinderella's two feet with both their heels and all their ten toes slipped into them as easily as a titmouse into its nest.

When Cinderella was brought to the King and the Queen, they received her as if she were a long-lost daughter. Far and near, once more, at her wedding, the bonfires blazed all night among the hills, the fountains in the market-place ran with wine, there were stalls of venison pies, black puddings and eels, sweetmeats, cakes and comfits, and such a concourse of strangers and noblemen in the city as it had never contained before.

Of Cinderella's guests of honour the first was a humpity-backed old woman muffled up in a green mantle, who ate nothing, and drank nothing, and said nothing; but smiled and smiled and smiled.

As for the elder sisters, they sat at home listening to the wedding bells clashing their changes in the steeples. The one being without a heel to her left foot, and the other without a big toe, they walked lame ever afterwards. And their neighbours, laughing at their folly, called them the Two Old Stump-stumps.